UNEP

PROFILE

UNITED
NATIONS
ENVIRONMENT
PROGRAMME

The Global View

If present trends continue, in just 10 years—the year 2000—one third of the world's productive land will have eroded, a million species will be annihilated while a billion more people compete for resources, and the world's climate will change, with enormous, unknown consequences for us all. In each case, human activities will be to blame.

In just the past five years, Bhopal, the African famine, Chernobyl and the Alaska oil spill have brought into sharp focus the tragic consequences of environmental mismanagement and abuse.

These misuses have led to air, water and waste pollution. In the developing countries, additional problems have arisen, such as rapid population growth sparking explosive urban sprawl, and widespread poverty leading to natural resource destruction. For many poverty is rising, and life goes from bad to worse. In a Catch 22 situation, as economic growth slows, environmental deterioration quickens, and sustainable development seems more difficult to achieve.

Now the systems that support all life are threatened: the oceans, soils and forests, atmosphere and global climate that provide our basic needs.

These threats could be greatly reduced:
- if the arms race is slowed, freeing massive financial, material and intellectual resources, and
- if the crushing $1.3 trillion debt burden on developing countries is eased, making it possible to create a more balanced economic and physical environment.

Opinion polls show that people around the world are worried—even angry—about the environment they live in, worse now than 10 years ago. As they urge leaders to action, their governments turn to the UN Environment Programme to coordinate solutions at the international level.

These same governments will hold a major **UN Conference on Environment and Development in Brazil in June 1992,** 20 years after the first conference created UNEP and the now widely accepted view that we must "think globally and act locally"—a concept more urgent today than ever.

Earthwatch

Earthwatch assesses the global environment, collecting and disseminating information in 142 countries. It has three major components:

The **Global Environmental Monitoring System** (GEMS) coordinates data at the national, regional and global levels, and it monitors: ■ renewable resources; ■ climate systems, including global warming; ■ air, water and food contamination; ■ pollutants that cross national boundaries; ■ rare or endangered species, and their trade; ■ parks and protected areas.

GEMS makes these data available to natural resource managers and planners around the world.

Information is the key to environmentally sound development, and **Infoterra** is UNEP's master key: a worldwide network for environmental data. With 6,200 information sources in 134 countries, not to mention in the UN system itself, Infoterra responded to 14,000 queries in 1988 alone.

With 80,000 chemicals already on the market and nearly 2,000 new ones introduced each year, UNEP's chemical information exchange bridges the gap between producers and users around the world. Its **International Register of Potentially Toxic Chemicals** (IRPTC) provides scientific, technical and legal data to those who need it. It has helped several developing countries set up chemical information systems.

IRPTC collaborates on the **International Program on Chemical Safety** with the UN International Labour Organization and the World Health Organization, issuing guidelines for exposure and testing. Similarly it works with WHO and the UN Food and Agriculture Organization to reduce the dangers of pesticide use in developing countries. UNEP also administers the 1989 **Basel Convention on International Trade in Hazardous Wastes**, aimed at controlling the movement and final disposal of toxic wastes shipped abroad.

Infoterra: In the U.S., Linda Spencer (202) 475-8710; in Canada, Agatha Bysiram (613) 997-2485.

IRPTC: In the U.S., Carl Mazza, (202) 382-3442; in Canada, Dr. Peter Toft (613) 957-3133. Both services are free.

A briefing paper, "Hazardous Chemicals," is available free from UNEP (see coupon for address and phone number).

Public Outreach

A 1989 Lou Harris survey of environmental issues found people acutely worried worldwide. The poll, commissioned by UNEP, revealed concern—from [illegible] to Zimbabwe—about the quality of drinking water, chemical pollution, loss of farmland and forests, and the disposal of toxic wastes. People in every country said they believe pollution will get worse before it gets better.

To provide accurate information on these global concerns, UNEP works cooperatively with the **news and entertainment** media, producing documentary films and several publications. It gives the prestigious **Global 500** awards for ecological achievement. And every year on the weekend closest to World Environment Day, June 5th, faith communities worldwide celebrate the **Environmental Sabbath** as a day of rest and restoration for the earth.

Nearly a fifth of UNEP's budget is spent on education and training. For example, it has trained more than 2,000 scientists in environmental monitoring, about 1,500 technicians and farmers in pest control, and an equivalent number of technicians from developing countries in the conservation of national genetic resources.

In 1975 UNEP and UNESCO jointly launched the **International Environmental Education Program**, which has reached 10,000 educators so far and countless numbers of schoolchildren. Today at least 45 countries include environmental education in their school curricula, and over 140 countries have been involved in program activities.

Through the independent Environment Liaison Centre in Nairobi, UNEP is in contact with 10,000 environmental groups worldwide. UNEP also has special relations with international youth organizations as well as with leaders of the women's movement and industry associations. In the last few years, involved citizens in several countries have formed national committees to build support for UNEP. In the United States, it is **Friends of UNEP** (FUNEP), 2013 Q Street, N.W., Washington, DC 20009; (202) 483-4805.

A bimonthly newsletter, "UNEP North America News," is available free of charge to concerned professionals (see coupon for address).

Water Resources

More than 97 percent of all water on Earth is sea water, and most of the world's wastes—some 20 billion metric tons a year—end up in our oceans, generally in coastal waters where they interfere with fisheries, development and recreation.

Just one percent of the world's fresh water is available for human use; the rest is frozen in glaciers and ice caps. If managed efficiently, there would be enough for everyone, but unequal distribution, contamination and waste are threatening present and future supplies.

Ocean Cleanup

Since 1973, UNEP has involved 130 governments, 16 UN bodies and 40 organizations in its 10 **regional seas programs**. The goal is to control coastal pollution, monitor the ocean environment and protect marine life. Work began in 1975 with the heavily polluted Mediterranean. Today 17 states and the EEC are involved, along with more than 80 national centres. The next step is to coordinate cooperation among all regional seas programs and to improve worldwide monitoring of the open oceans.

A briefing paper, "Cleaning Up the Seas," is available free from UNEP (see coupon for address and phone number).

Fresh Water

Nearly 2 billion people have inadequate drinking water, and 3 billion lack proper sanitation. So, in 1985, UNEP launched its **Program for the Environmentally Sound Management of Inland Water** (EMINWA), a major initiative aimed at safeguarding the world's fresh water.

Begun in the Zambezi River Basin of Africa, by 1990 the plan will serve as a model for two other African river and lake basins—in Chad and Kenya—and then be adapted for other major inland waterways throughout the world.

A briefing paper, "Safeguarding the World's Water," is available free from UNEP (see coupon for address and phone number).

Atmosphere

Chemical pollution is changing the structure Earth's atmosphere, and UNEP is monitoring t changes through a 50-nation network.

The damage air pollution causes—to huma health, agriculture, forest growth, water resource and man-made structures—has a real cost. Th French estimate airborne chemicals cost them or percent of gross domestic product every year.

Concern for human and economic health ha sparked national and international action on several interrelated fronts: against ozone-layer destruction, global warming and acid precipitation.

Acid Air

The Congressional Office of Technology Assessment estimated that 50,000 to 200,000 Americans die annually from airborne chemicals.

UNEP and the World Health Organization have warned that acid deposition threatens the physical well-being of half a billion people worldwide—as well as fresh water fish, forests and croplands.

One hopeful step is the 1979 **Convention on Long-Range Transboundary Air Pollution**, which went into effect in 1987. In one regulatory protocol, Canada and 17 European countries agreed that by 1993 at the latest they would reduce sulphur emissions, or their transboundary flows, at least 30 percent below 1980 levels. To control the other major component of acid rain, nitrogen oxides, th European nations, U.K. and U.S. signed a lega protocol in 1988—not yet in force—that will hol NO_x emissions below 1987 levels.

Ozone Layer Loss

A layer of ozone surrounds Earth like a delicat veil, protecting us from the sun's harmful rays. Bu as ozone in the stratosphere decreases, ultraviole radiation increases along with the risk of ski cancers, eye disease, smaller food crops, fish an timber yields, air pollution and climate change.

After long negotiations under UNEP, worl nations took a major step in September 198 toward halting ozone-layer loss. They agreed t limit emissions of ozone-destroying chemicals: chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) and halons. In May 1989, after scientists found much higher levels of these chemicals than predicted, 81 governments and the European Community agreed to completely stop production and use of CFCs by 2000 and to phase out using other ozone-depleting substances.

Global Warming

If the world's atmosphere did not act like a greenhouse, life on earth would be impossible. Sunlight heats the sea and land, the warmed Earth radiates heat back into space, and some infrared radiation is absorbed by trace gases.

Recent human activities—expanding population, industry, transportation and agriculture—have inexorably increased carbon dioxide (CO_2) and other greenhouse gases. Scientists generally agree that more greenhouse gases will make Earth warmer, but when, where and how remain the subject of widespread discussion.

The major causes are burning fossil fuels and deforestation. Burning trees not only add CO_2 to the atmosphere but since trees absorb the gas, their loss adds more carbon dioxide to the heat trap.

Global warming will arrive slowly. It could shift climate zones 100 miles or more towards the poles, affecting food production and distribution worldwide—although agriculture can adapt with different crops, varieties and farming methods. Scientists estimate temperatures will rise from 3° to 9.5° F. over the next 40 years, raising oceans up to 4.5 feet and threatening low-lying island states, coastal cities and wetlands.

Because "the greenhouse effect" is global, in November 1988 UNEP and the UN World Meteorological Organization formed the **Inter-Governmental Panel on Climate Change**. They set it an enormous task: to unify the world's scientific and policy-making communities for effective, realistic and equitable action on climate change. More than 1,000 experts from 60 countries are participating, and UNEP hopes a treaty will be ready for signing in 1992.

A briefing paper, "The Changing Atmosphere," and two booklets, "The Greenhouse Gases" and "The Ozone Layer," are available free from UNEP (see coupon for address and phone number).

Losing Ground

We are losing ground in our struggle to feed the hungry. Every year 15 million acres of farmland are lost forever while another 50 million acres—an area the size of Kansas—lose their productive capacity.

Land is swept away by wind and rain, sterilized by salts (up to a quarter of America's irrigated farmland suffers from salinization). It is poisoned by chemicals, leached of nutrients, and buried under swamps or buildings.

Technical solutions exist—reforestation, soil and water conservation, controlled irrigation, integrated pest control—with benefits outweighing costs many times over.

In 1982 UNEP's Governing Council adopted a **World Soils Policy**. To prepare the ground for a World Soils Action Plan, UNEP is helping individual governments formulate national soil policies while helping to coordinate basic research and pilot projects in the field.

The African drought of 1968-74 led to the 1977 **UN Conference on Desertification**, which charged UNEP with coordinating and implementing its Plan of Action. UNEP has therefore worked through several UN agencies, governments, the press and citizens' groups to slow the spread of arid lands worldwide. Despite these efforts, progress has been slow. Many countries—even those most affected—have not committed themselves politically or financially to the resolution of this situation.

A briefing paper, "Sands of Change," is available free from UNEP (see coupon for address and phone number).

As trees are cut down ❶, soil is stripped from the hills causing landslides and crop losses ❷ & ❸. It silts up reservoirs and raises river beds ❹ & ❺, shortening the life of dams and leading to floods. The silt forms new islands in estuaries ❻ and depletes coastal fisheries ❼.

Tropical Forests

UNEP believes it is vital to save the world's tropical forests—now disappearing at the rate of nearly an acre a second or 3,000 acres an hour. While many UN bodies have commercial interests in forestry, UNEP speaks for the unique nature of the tropical forest, one that cannot be recreated with commercial plantations.

Tropical forests cover 6 percent of the Earth's land surface and are the source of half our medicines as well as other products. But equally important, they regulate climate and prevent floods and landslides. Now they are being lost to agriculture, cattle ranching, logging, highways, mining and drowned by huge hydroelectric dams.

UNEP introduced environmental issues into the trade-regulating **International Tropical Timber Agreement.** It also joined the UN Development Programme, Food and Agriculture Organization, World Bank and World Resources Institute in developing and implementing the on-going **Tropical Forestry Action Plan**. Today, a key issue is how to compensate these countries for protecting the natural wealth of their forests.

A briefing paper, "The Disappearing Forests," is available free from UNEP (see coupon for address and phone number).

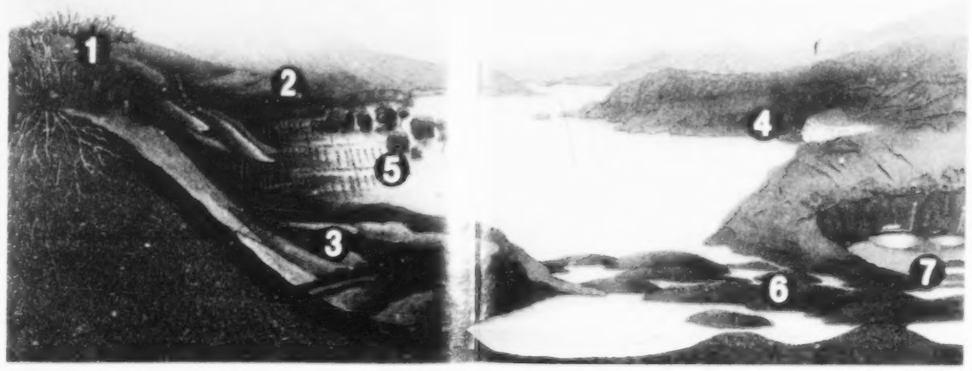
Wildlife

We are just one of perhaps 30 million species alive today. In the next 30 years, unless drastic steps are taken, we will preside over a holocaust that could remove one-quarter of them from the face of the Earth. Most will die unknown.

In developing countries, where two-thirds of land-based species live, rural communities would lose an important source of food, medicine and materials. In industrialized countries, the massacre could destroy cures for disease and sacrifice hardy food gene stocks, so necessary in a world where uniform crops can be devoured by a single scourge.

Convinced that the future of humanity is bound to the fate of other threatened species, UNEP has begun working on a binding convention to save Earth's disappearing plant and animal life. It will focus on habitat protection. Two habitat treaties already exist, one that protects wetlands and another to conserve cultural and natural heritage. Wildlife treaties also exist—one restricts or prohibits trade in 800 endangered species while another protects migratory species—but none of them covers the full range of biological diversity.

Two booklets, "The African Elephant" and "Marine Mammals," are available free from UNEP (see coupon for address).



UNEP's Role

A David among UN Goliaths, UNEP was, in 1972, the first UN body to be based in the Third World—in Kenya. UNEP still is unique in its role as a catalyst and coordinator, not only within the UN system but with governments, international organizations, scientists and environmental groups.

Its 1,000 programs and projects cover the ecology of the planet, but as the UN Environment Programme enters the 1990s, its most pressing issues are controlling hazardous wastes, the threats of atmospheric pollution and climate change, and the potential loss of one million species.

To help UNEP assign priorities, its 58-nation Governing Council establishes policies and programs at its biennial meeting in Nairobi. Unlike many other organizations in the UN system, UNEP is not a funding agency. It uses its resources to start programs that will draw funding from other agencies, organizations and governments. So far, UNEP has raised $4 million for the environment for every $1 million that it has spent.

Most of its funds come from two sources: the UN regular budget and voluntary contributions by governments. The UN funds—just $5 million a year—pay some administrative costs, including Governing Council meetings. Voluntary contributions have averaged about $30 million a year. The USA has given the most—around $10 million a year—but countries with some of the world's lowest incomes also contribute. In all, 65 countries gave $40 million to UNEP in 1989. The new target is $100 million annually by 1992.

Roughly three-fifths of these contributions are spent on global programs while the remainder is used to spark action on Third World environmental problems. Overseeing it all is UNEP's small staff —just 180 professionals worldwide.

Outside of its Nairobi headquarters, UNEP has offices in Bahrain, Bangkok, Geneva, Mexico City, New York and Washington. Other outposts include its toxic chemicals program in Geneva, the Industry and Environment Office in Paris, Mediterranean Sea coordinating unit in Athens and the endangered species secretariat in Lausanne.

Publications

❑ **Environmental Perspective to the Year 2000 and Beyond,** 34 pages, $25, highlights possible national and international policies and actions.
- Sectoral issues: population, food and agriculture, energy, industry, health and human settlements, international economic relations;
- Other global issues: oceans and seas, outer space, biological diversity, security and environment;
- Tools for action: assessment and planning, laws, awareness building, training and institutions.

❑ **1989 State of the World Environment**, 43 pages, plus preface and summary, $22.
- Part I deals with environmental quality, development and environment;
- Part II is on greenhouse gases and climate;
- Part III focuses on hazardous waste.

❑ **1988 State of the Environment**: "The Public and Environment," 43 pages, $22, focuses on ecological awareness and attitudes, public participation, and the role of women and the media.

❑ **1988 Annual Report of the Executive Director**, 102 pages, $18, includes the year in retrospect, UNEP's role, its program, relevant inter-governmental legislation, funding, staffing and Governing Council members.

❑ **1987 Annual Report of the Executive Director**, 280 pages, $30, contents similar to 1988, plus complete lists of the year's publications, papers and meetings.

Name _____

Address _____

_____ Zip _____

To order, send a check or money order to:
UNEP, DC2-803, United Nations, New York, NY 10017,
or telephone (212) 963-8093.